

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Esher College

April 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

| Activity | Inspection grades | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Programme area | 9% | 59% | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| Cross-college provision | 14% | 50% | 31% | 5% | <1% |
| Overall | 12% | 54% | 30% | 4% | <1% |

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 50/97

ESHER COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September 1996-January 1997

Summary

Esher College in Surrey has a deservedly high reputation for the achievements of its students and for its standard of pastoral care. Since incorporation, the college has achieved 28 per cent growth in student numbers, nearly all aged between 16 and 19. Ninety-four per cent of students are on advanced level programmes, GCE A level or advanced GNVQ, and they are able to choose from a wide range of subjects. Entry to the college is competitive because demand for places exceeds the college's capacity. Governors have wide expertise and are strongly committed to the college. The college is effectively managed. Students' progress is monitored carefully and the college makes effective use of value-added data. The quality of teaching is good and staff have high expectations of students. Students' achievements are consistently above national averages. The college provides excellent opportunities for work experience. Staff are highly qualified. The college should: clarify the role of some senior managers after the recent restructuring of the college; strengthen the management of some GNVQ programmes; improve the planning and management of staff development so that it relates more closely to strategic objectives; raise the quality of some of its equipment and accommodation; and ensure that its health and safety policy is more consistently implemented.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

| Aspects of cross-college provision | | Grade |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| Responsiveness and range of provision | | 2 |
| Governance and management | | 2 |
| Students' recruitment, guidance and support | | 1 |
| Quality assurance | | 2 |
| Resources: | staffing | 1 |
| | equipment/learning resources | 3 |
| | accommodation | 3 |

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Mathematics and computing | 2 | English | 1 |
| Science | 2 | Foreign languages and classical civilisation | 2 |
| Business studies and economics | 2 | Social sciences (geography, government and politics, history, philosophy, psychology and sociology) | 1 |
| Performing arts and media studies | 2 | | |
| Art and design | 1 | | |

INTRODUCTION

1 Esher College was inspected in three phases. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1996, curriculum areas were inspected in May and December 1996 and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in January 1997. Twelve inspectors visited the college for a total of 53 days. They inspected 113 classes and examined students' practical and written work. They met college staff, managers, governors, parents, students, and representatives of the local community and the training and enterprise council (TEC). They examined college documents, including records of meetings, policy statements, planning documents, and performance data such as students' examination and retention statistics.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Esher College, in Thames Ditton, Surrey, is a sixth form college established in 1974. It had formerly been the Surbiton County Grammar School, founded in 1926. Surrey Education Authority has a variety of arrangements for post-16 education. There are schools for pupils aged 12 to 16 and 12 to 18, sixth form colleges and general further education colleges within Esher College's catchment area. There are also schools for pupils aged 11 to 18 in neighbouring education authorities. The college has only two formal partner schools, one of which is grant maintained and will open its own sixth form in 1998. Despite this competitive environment, the college has steadily increased in popularity and it is oversubscribed. The college attracts students from over 120 schools.

3 In November 1996, full-time students numbered 1,255, an increase of 28 per cent since 1993. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. At the time of the inspection there were 72 full-time equivalent teachers giving a staff to student ratio of 1:17. There were 24 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. There are four faculties, which fulfil both academic and pastoral functions: design and expressive arts; humanities; mathematics and science; and social sciences and business communications.

4 The college states its mission as being a strong, successful, academic community; providing a caring environment with equal opportunities for all; offering broad, balanced and coherent programmes of study; creating a sound foundation for continuing education, work and leisure; enhancing each individual's abilities; increasing the enjoyment of learning; and developing in every student the ability and will to contribute to the community.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 Managers are aware of the government's aims for further education and take them into account in drawing up the college's strategic plan and in developing the curriculum. The strategic plan states that the college is mainly for students aged 16 to 19 on full-time programmes. There is a strong emphasis on creating a supportive community. Seventy-five per cent of students follow general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) or GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses. The college has introduced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at intermediate and advanced level, recruiting to six advanced courses and four intermediate courses in the 1996-97 academic year. Following a review, the college discontinued its general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) programme. Instead, students are encouraged to follow GNVQ intermediate courses with the opportunity to resit one or two key GCSE subjects. There are 74 students following this scheme, constituting about 6 per cent of the total student body. There are no foundation level courses. The college also offers a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in administration, and single-subject courses in numeracy, communications, information processing, typewriting and wordprocessing. The part-time evening provision for adults is small and consists only of life drawing and counselling. There are other well-established providers of adult education in the area.

6 The college offers a wide range of 48 GCE A level and 15 GCE AS subjects. Students are encouraged to take programmes comprising two GCE A levels and two GCE AS subjects rather than three GCE A levels. This year 287 students are studying one or more GCE AS subjects. There are options within some of the GCE A levels. GCSE courses are offered in English, mathematics, biology, French, integrated humanities and physical education. GCE A level students are encouraged to retake GCSE English and mathematics if their grades are low. The college has 235 students studying GNVQ advanced courses with most of those in their first year taking additional qualifications such as GCE AS/A levels, GCSEs or an NVQ in administration.

7 The college promotes breadth in the students' curriculum through a programme of complementary studies which offers over 60 options. It is accredited through the Surrey Open College Federation. A wide range of sporting activities is offered. Other enrichment opportunities include a week at the local arts centre for performing arts students, work on the college magazine, visits to theatres and exhibitions, curriculum visits to Europe and exchanges with France and Germany which include work experience.

8 The college has links with Surrey University, the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, Kingston University, the University of the South Bank and Roehampton Institute of Higher Education. There are special arrangements to help students to progress to the University of the South

Bank and Surrey University in certain disciplines. There are strong links between the art and design department and several higher education institutions including the London College of Fashion and Central Saint Martins. An arrangement with Surrey Institute of Art and Design allows students to enter its foundation course on the basis of a recommendation by college staff, rather than through the usual competitive interview.

9 The college is a member of the Elmbridge Education Business Partnership. It also has collaborative links with other sixth form colleges through the Surrey sixth form principals' meetings; Sixth Form Colleges South, an external quality review scheme; and subject teacher panels. Informal agreements have been reached with other sixth form colleges to ensure that minority subjects such as music and classical civilisation are taught by at least one college in the area. The college produces regular newsletters for parents and also for local residents, with whom a liaison group has been established.

10 The college has a director of marketing who is a teacher released for five periods each week for this additional role. Since the college is heavily oversubscribed, expenditure on the marketing budget is small, at 0.23 per cent of the college budget. The general perception of the marketing role is largely one of promotion, although senior managers and the marketing group have a broader view which is expressed in the marketing plan. Some market research has been conducted to assess the demand for evening classes, but areas for future development have not been determined. The marketing group evaluates the effectiveness of open evenings, the prospectus, and customer satisfaction.

11 The college has a well-established equal opportunities group and the equal opportunities policy is known and supported by staff and students. There is a procedure to counter harassment which is well publicised. It contains clear and sensitive guidelines for dealing with complaints.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

12 There are currently 17 members of the corporation including the principal. At the time of inspection there were three vacancies, including one which the corporation reserves to introduce a new member when the need arises for special expertise. There are nine business members, a member nominated by the local TEC, one co-opted member, two parents, two staff members and a student observer. The corporation benefits from their broad experience, which includes law, personnel management, finance, market research and surveying. There are six women members. The average attendance at corporation meetings between 1994 and 1996 was 74 per cent.

13 Governors are supportive of the aims of the college and take a keen interest in its work. They attend college functions and events regularly. All governors are linked with a department or curriculum area to improve their understanding of the college's work. Some governors have observed

teaching when they have visited departments. They have a clear understanding of their role and leave day-to-day management to the principal and his senior staff. Governors receive a useful introductory handbook and attend appropriate training events in the college and outside. Although they have spent much of their time since incorporation dealing with finance, estates and personnel matters, they have a clear understanding of students' achievements and the college's performance in relation to other sixth form colleges and general further education colleges in the area. The corporation has yet to consider in detail means to reduce the college's reliance on income from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

14 The corporation has an appropriate range of committees: audit; finance; personnel; curriculum; buildings; remuneration; review; and a special committee which considers grievances or appeals against disciplinary action. The review committee has been set up to monitor the effectiveness of the corporation board itself. It has recently organised a governors' training day on the roles and responsibilities of governors. The arrangements for clerking the board are not effective. Governors receive regular reports from managers but minutes of meetings are often brief, and have insufficient reference to supporting papers. The board does not always pay sufficient attention to matters of procedure. For example, there is no record that the terms of reference for committees have been formally approved.

15 Staff take part in strategic planning. Departments produce annual reports and operational plans. These contribute to the college's strategic plan and operational objectives for the coming year, which are subsequently reviewed. There is little evidence that these formal procedures have much impact on the day-to-day conduct of the college. The college collects, analyses and takes appropriate action on information on students, such as examination results and rates of retention. In reviewing these performance measures staff draw appropriate comparisons with national and college averages, but do not set targets for improvement. Although governors have received copies of the strategic plan for 1996-99, there is no record that they have formally adopted it. The chairman of the corporation sets and reviews annual objectives for the principal.

16 Management is effective and consultative. The principal is supported by a deputy principal and two senior directors. One of the latter takes responsibility for curriculum development, and the other for student guidance and support. These senior staff form the college steering group. This group meets twice weekly. Other college managers are invited to join the group for one of its weekly meetings. Notes of the meetings are not circulated to members of the group. There is a larger policy group which includes members of the steering group, the directors of faculties and other college managers. This is the college's decision-making group on matters of policy. The policy group has two subcommittees: curriculum

development and student guidance. There is some duplication of debate between the policy group and its two subcommittees. The college is considering how it might deal with this without lessening the opportunity to involve staff in decision-making. Teaching and pastoral support for students are well managed. The four faculties are each led by a director, supported by heads of subject department. There is an assistant director in each faculty to provide support on tutorial matters. There are job descriptions. Management responsibilities are understood, but there is a need to clarify the roles of some senior managers following recent changes in personnel and redistribution of the work.

17 Faculties and departments meet regularly and all teaching staff are expected to join at least one college development group set up to address specific issues. There is a calendar for all college meetings. Meetings are minuted and actions followed up. Communication is good. Staff are well informed through the line management structure, by their attendance at meetings, by a weekly briefing conducted by the principal, by the staff bulletin which is published weekly, by twice-termly staff meetings with the principal and senior managers and by the minutes of meetings and notices which are posted on the staff room notice-board.

18 The college has consistently met its targets for growth. Between 1993 and 1996 the number of full-time students increased from 979 to 1,255. The college has had to make efficiency savings and has reduced its expenditure on staff. Since 1994, 13 senior members of staff have left the college through early retirement and redundancy. The proportion of the college's income spent on staff fell from 84 per cent in 1994-95 to an estimated 73 per cent in 1996-97.

19 Faculties and subject departments make bids for teaching materials and major equipment. The staffing budget is held centrally. Departments have some discretion on how they spend their budgets. There is no central purchasing policy, other than for information technology equipment, and consequently opportunities for savings are lost. Budget holders receive useful monthly reports on their expenditure. However, not all staff fully understand the basis on which budget allocations have been made. Governors receive financial information twice each term but the form in which they are presented is to be changed to make it more consistent with standard accounting practice and more useful to governors so that they can see the relationship between income and expenditure. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.36 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.36 per unit. The college's management information system is effective in producing information for the FEFC and for its own requirements. The quality and presentation of statistical data for internal use are improving.

20 There are policies for many aspects of college life including equal opportunities and health and safety. Responsibilities for their implementation are appropriately allocated. Inspectors found several

examples of poor safety practice and monitoring of the health and safety policy should be strengthened. The college satisfies the requirements of Sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* in providing opportunities for religious worship and education. Appropriate facilities are made available on request for students of faiths other than Christianity.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

21 The college attracts students from an exceptionally large range of more than 120 schools covering a wide geographical area. The college has an open evening and three information evenings. Staff attend careers events in schools. The college is developing a closer relationship with a small number of schools from which it recruits substantial numbers. Its admissions policy, which is sent to all prospective students, is to offer places on a 'first come, first served' basis to students who fulfil the course entry requirements. The college had to close its application list before the November open evening in 1996. It is considering amending its policy to ensure that the college attracts and enrolls a wider range of applicants.

22 Students receive thorough guidance when choosing their courses. They are interviewed initially at the college. Those who accept a place are invited to an introduction day in June to meet staff and find out more about their courses. A further interview takes place at enrolment, where the agreed programmes of study are reviewed in the light of students' GCSE results. Interviews are conducted sensitively, particularly where students' achievements have failed to match their expectations. Students' career aspirations and a concern to ensure that students have a broad curriculum are taken into account; students whose choice of subjects is narrow are encouraged to add a contrasting course from a complementary studies programme. Adjustments to a student's course are possible after the first two weeks of term, although the choice of alternatives is sometimes restricted by unavailability of places.

23 Enrolment procedures are well managed. The directors of guidance and curriculum check that students' GCSE results match entry requirements. Staff from the college careers department are also on hand to help students. By the end of their first week at the college, all students have been allocated a tutor and have had an individual interview. Tutors ensure that students receive a thorough introduction to the college, and managers and staff guide them through activities planned to build good relationships within the tutor group. Most of the first week is devoted to induction into subjects and courses. There are helpful course guides for students. Staff help students to understand the transition from GCSE work to advanced level GCE or GNVQ, and use imaginative approaches to illustrate the challenges ahead.

24 There is generally good support for students with learning difficulties. Procedures for identifying literacy needs are effective. There is no systematic screening for students who have difficulty with numeracy,

although mathematics support is provided automatically for intermediate level students, for GCE A level students by arrangement, and as an option within the college's complementary studies programme. Students whose learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been identified in their applications, or during their initial interviews, are given appropriate guidance at enrolment. A brief written exercise completed by all students in an early tutorial alerts the learning support staff to students who have difficulties and they follow these students up with a more detailed diagnosis. All intermediate GNVQ students are screened to assess their level of key skills. Subject teachers are adept at identifying learning needs which emerge at a later stage, and there are good communications to ensure that all staff know which students are receiving help. The literacy support provided is expertly taught, planned to suit individual needs, and highly valued by students and their parents. The college has a good reputation for its success in identifying and dealing with problems which had not previously been diagnosed. For example, 22 students were newly identified as dyslexic last year. Twelve students receive special help from a teacher of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The college is considering ways of identifying and assisting students of exceptional academic ability, which are in addition to the support already given to students applying to Oxford or Cambridge universities. The college has a disability statement which has been approved by the governors. Few students with physical disabilities attend the college, but there are appropriate procedures for the guidance and support of those who do.

25 Most full-time and many part-time teachers are tutors. However, the increasing number of students in tutor groups, and the occasional difficulties of sharing a group between two part-time teachers, are putting pressure on the college's high standard of tutorial support. Tutor groups mix students from all levels, subjects and programmes; an approach which is welcomed by students themselves. This year, a second-year student was paired with each new student for the first few days of the college year to provide practical advice and moral support while the newcomers settled in. There is a detailed tutor handbook, a weekly bulletin and materials to illustrate suggested tutorial topics. Students meet their tutors briefly every day for registration, and there is an administration session and a weekly tutorial period. The content of the latter varies at the discretion of the tutor, though some elements are mandatory. There are frequent talks by guest speakers, often on subjects suggested by students. A tutorial planning group has developed a programme of personal, social and vocational skills, to be accredited through Surrey Open College Federation. Tutors monitor students' academic progress in individual review sessions during which subject reports are discussed and action plans drawn up. Although the college does not encourage students to maintain records of achievement, tutors maintain detailed records of their progress and aspirations. The directors and assistant directors of faculty record these assessments, provide support in disciplinary matters and co-ordinate the tutorial programmes.

26 A fair balance is struck between the promotion of students' independence and the college's belief that parents should be party to all essential information. Parents are invited to meet personal tutors early in the first term, and thereafter receive reports and invitations to consultation evenings. They appreciate the level of information they receive from the college and the quality of the support provided for students. Students help at college functions and are eloquent advocates for the college. The college has a code of conduct for students. Its acceptance is a condition of the offer of a place. There are disciplinary procedures dealing with such issues as poor attendance, lateness and failure to complete work. An electronic attendance and registration system provides tutors and subject teachers with detailed and prompt information about students' attendance. The relevant head of faculty is informed when a student's attendance falls below the college's target and a letter to parents is sent automatically. Attendance has improved over the last two years, since this system was introduced.

27 Careers guidance is good. Staff from the college careers department work closely with county careers officers to meet the needs of all students. Personal interviews are available to help students draw up action plans; group interviews and workshops are given on specific careers and higher education; and there is a broad range of computer programs and literature in the careers library. A week's work experience or work-related activity is provided for all first-year students. The college was the first to receive the Surrey Education Business Partnership award for the quality of its work-experience programme. There are more than 60 participating employers and they speak highly of the students involved. There is a carefully co-ordinated programme of guidance for students wishing to progress to higher education. A higher education day for students, their parents and invited pupils from local schools and other colleges is attended by about 90 admissions tutors and university staff. During tutorials, students are helped to write their personal statements for university application and there are thorough procedures to ensure that subject teachers contribute to the references written by tutors. Careers staff provide practice interviews. A tutorial day in early September concentrates on applying to higher education.

28 A team of four teachers and one support staff member, all of whom are qualified counsellors, provide a valuable personal counselling service which is available to students and staff. Access is discreet and referral to external agencies can be made when appropriate. Individual sessions are recorded and an annual report produced, although no data are provided on the kinds of problems encountered. Nineteen students have completed an innovative student counselling course run as part of the complementary studies programme and they offer peer support to other students.

29 A students' council organises social and fund-raising events for charity, supports student societies, and runs a small shop. The members of the council are volunteers, except the five executive members who are

elected by the student body to carry a particular responsibility and to represent the student body on a number of committees. A member of the teaching staff liaises with the council, attends its weekly meetings and advises the group about taking their plans forward.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

30 Good teaching was observed in all curriculum areas. The standard in art and design, English and social sciences was particularly high. Of the 113 sessions inspected, 77 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This is 14 per cent above the average for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Less than 4 per cent of classes had weaknesses which outweighed their strengths. The average attendance in the classes inspected was good at 85 per cent. In no subject was the average attendance lower than 80 per cent. The average number of students in each session was 14. Punctuality was generally satisfactory, although lateness for mathematics classes was above the average. Rarely did lateness go unchallenged by staff. The following table summarises the grades given to each of the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study

| Programmes | Grade 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | 30 | 39 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 85 |
| GCSE | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| GNVQ | 3 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 15 |
| Other | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Total | 34 | 53 | 22 | 4 | 0 | 113 |

31 There is a good rapport between staff and students. A good standard of discipline is maintained. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and convey their enthusiasm to students. Students find staff approachable when they need help. In English, relationships are informal and friendly but business like and students know where they stand. In humanities, relationships are good and purposeful. Staff have high expectations of students. They are committed to their work. In art and design, staff have broadened their personal skills to cover the developing GNVQ provision. Students enjoy their studies and are enthusiastic about the progress they make. Many speak highly of the way their courses are organised. They are complimentary about their teachers and about both the challenge and support they provide.

32 In most subject areas, schemes of work are well planned, adequately detailed, and have clear aims and objectives. These schemes are discussed with students or laid down in student handbooks. Examples of good practice were seen in social sciences, where students receive useful and attractive subject handbooks. The best subject handbooks inform students

about their tutors, departmental aims, the learning process, what is expected of them, what resources are available to them, what books to consult, the syllabus and assessment requirements. Some course handbooks also contain an outline scheme of work and an assignment timetable. Students find these handbooks useful throughout their courses. In GNVQ media studies at both intermediate and advanced levels, schemes of work are inadequate to ensure consistency of approach to assignments and proper monitoring of students' progress. Course teams do not plan together and staff do not know how key skills should be developed and assessed.

33 The planning of lessons is generally good. In the better examples, there is a firm structure for the session which enables the teacher to set new material in the context of previous learning. Aims of sessions are shared with students and there is opportunity for the assessment of students' achievements at the end of the session. The content of most lessons is appropriate and teachers take account of the differing abilities of students. In mathematics, however, the wide range of ability in some classes made it difficult for the teacher to meet the needs of all students.

34 There were some outstanding sessions. In a GCE A level English language lesson, students reported the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* in the style of *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *Just Seventeen*, or *Woman's Realm*. The resulting presentations were entertaining and lively and showed students' awareness of the character of language. In a GCE A level English literature lesson, students discussed romantic love in *As You Like It*, in comparison with its treatment in *Twelfth Night*. In a drawing and painting lesson, students were developing a bas-relief collage to extend their drawing and mark-making skills. The tutor provided individual support in a positive and encouraging way. The criteria for assessment were stated clearly, but students were also prompted to determine their own measures for success.

35 Study skills are developed in tutorials and as part of the normal teaching process. The extent to which key skills are taught effectively varies across the college. In some GNVQ programmes, key skills are not sufficiently defined to guarantee adequate coverage in learning activities and assignments. The teaching of information technology is patchy. In social science subjects there is little use of computers, except in geography where information technology is well developed. Mathematics staff service GNVQ programmes and provide additional support for students on any course which has a mathematical or computational element through the complementary studies programme.

36 Teachers use a variety of methods to stimulate and maintain students' interest, including work in pairs and groups, presentations by students, debates, discussions and formal teaching. In GCE A level business studies sessions, teachers vary the pace of work according to the degree of difficulty of each task. In foreign languages there are good opportunities for students

to speak in class, and oral presentations are well used to build students' confidence. Teachers make good use of question and answer sessions to develop students' ideas and to check that students are learning. In the better practice, there is regular reinforcement of earlier work and links are made to both past and future studies. Teachers help students to manage their time and to plan their work. In the weaker sessions, teaching which lacked variety failed to capture students' interest and provided little inspiration. In a few lessons, students remained passive and teachers did not direct questions to individual students to draw them into discussion. Much of the work in GCE A level media studies is concentrated on examination techniques and students have few opportunities to work on their own.

37 In all curriculum areas homework is set regularly. It is marked and returned to students within set deadlines and with due attention to correcting errors and explaining how the work could be improved. Regular use is made of testing. In science, standard marking schemes are used in all subjects. In social sciences, a substantial piece of work is set every two weeks and most teachers expect students to do some homework after every lesson. Students are made aware of the examination boards' assessment criteria. In politics, each assignment has a cover sheet which states the criteria for assessment. Teachers keep records of students' achievements and use them to monitor progress. Staff encourage weaker students to produce additional work.

38 In business studies, some assignments, particularly at intermediate level, clearly show the key skills to be assessed, whilst in others they are completely ignored. The art and design department has devised an outstanding computerised assessment system for GNVQ. In performing arts, students are unaware of the criteria for assessment and GNVQ students rely solely on published handbooks to inform them of the skills they are expected to acquire. There should be better co-ordination of assessment procedures throughout GNVQ programmes.

39 Some departments enrich their courses by providing opportunities for visits and by using visiting speakers. In science, there are additional classes for special level (GCE S level) students. In art and design, there are residencies and visits to galleries and, in performing arts, students mount college productions and go to see professional performances. In English, opportunities are provided for students to go to the theatre to see their set texts in performance, and the college magazine publishes students' work. All the teaching rooms used for English are decorated with students' work, posters and teaching aids.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

40 Most students demonstrate knowledge and skills at or beyond that expected of their courses. Students are generally self-confident. In science practical sessions, students work capably and safely. In English and social sciences written work is of a high standard. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally good, and their importance is understood.

41 The following table shows the number of students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations each year between 1994 and 1996, together with pass rates at grades A to E and A to C, measured against the national averages for sixth form colleges.

GCE A level entries and pass rates 1994-96

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of students entered | 344 | 415 | 439 |
| Number of subjects in which students were entered | 33 | 33 | 33 |
| Average pass rate A to E (%) | | | |
| National averages for sixth form colleges (%) in brackets | 90 (83) | 88 (84) | 91 (86) |
| Average pass rate A to C (%) | | | |
| National averages for sixth form colleges (%) in brackets | 56 (48) | 53 (49) | 62 (51) |
| Number of subjects with pass rates at or above national average | 24 | 21 | 24 |
| Number of subjects with pass rates below national average | 9 | 12 | 9 |

42 In 1996 in GCE A level examinations, the college's average pass rate at grades A to E was 5 per cent above the national average for sixth form colleges. The proportion of students achieving grades A to C was 11 per cent above the national average. Over the past three years, while the number of entries has increased by 28 per cent, the college has maintained pass rates above the national averages. Over the same period, student retention has improved from 77 to 83 per cent. Students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1996, scored on average 5.6 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the top 10 per cent of further education colleges on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

43 The college actively encourages students to take two GCE A levels and two GCE AS subjects. The following table shows the number of entries by students aged 16 to 18 for GCE AS from 1994 to 1996, together with pass rates at grades A to E and A to C, measured against national averages for sixth form colleges.

GCE AS entries and pass rates 1994-96

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of entries | 258 | 232 | 196 |
| Number of subjects in which students were entered | 23 | 19 | 18 |
| Average pass rate A to E (%) | | | |
| National averages for sixth form colleges (%) in brackets | 84 (73) | 80 (73) | 81 (70) |
| Average pass rate A to C (%) | | | |
| National averages for sixth form colleges (%) in brackets | 44 (37) | 43 (37) | 31 (33) |

44 Since 1993, the college has subscribed to an independent, external service which provides an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with their predicted performance based on GCSE achievements. In 1996, the value added was significantly above expectations in seven subjects, significantly below in three, and in line with expectations in 23. The three-year rolling average shows seven subjects performing significantly above expectations, only two below expectations, and 24 in line with them.

45 While the number of students aged 16 to 18 entered for the GCSE has dropped only slightly since 1994, the number of subject entries has fallen by 32 per cent. This is largely a consequence of the college's decision to introduce a wide range of vocational programmes which it considers more appropriate for many of the students who were previously enrolled on GCSE repeat courses. Pass rates at grades A* to C have been consistently above the national averages for sixth form colleges. In 1996, the largest numbers of entries were in mathematics and English language in which pass rates at grades A* to C of 57 and 48 per cent, respectively, were achieved; both were above the national average for sixth form colleges. Data on students' achievements on GCSE courses are summarised in the following table.

Students' achievements on GCSE courses 1994-96

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of students aged 16 to 18 | 175 | 153 | 160 |
| Number of subjects | 13 | 6 | 4 |
| Number of entries | 270 | 190 | 183 |
| Average pass rate grades A* to C | | | |
| National averages for sixth form colleges in brackets | 58 (49) | 56 (48) | 55 (51) |

46 In 1993, GNVQ intermediate programmes were introduced in art and design, business, and leisure and tourism. GNVQ media studies, communication and production, and a single-subject qualification in information processing, were introduced in 1994. The number of enrolments has fluctuated. Of the 65 students in their final year of study on the intermediate vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables 72 per cent were successful. This places the college in the top third of sector colleges on this performance measure. Eighty-seven per cent of students who completed these courses progressed to additional further education.

47 The college introduced the national diploma in business and finance in 1992. Of the 13 students enrolled, 12 completed the course successfully. By 1994, advanced GNVQ qualifications were available in four programmes; art and design, business, leisure and tourism, and health and social care. A total of 94 students were enrolled. Seventy-four students completed their programmes in 1996. Of these, 69 were successful, including 61 students who were awarded a merit or distinction. In 1996, 93 per cent of students on the advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. In 1996, five students aged 19 and over completed advanced level programmes: four progressed to higher education and one to additional further education.

48 The college records the destinations of its leavers. Data on destinations of students aged 16 to 18 completing GCE A level or advanced GNVQ programmes for the last two years are set out in the following table.

Destinations of students aged 16 to 18 in 1995 and 1996

| | 1995 | 1996 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total number of students completing level 3 courses | 425 | 471 |
| Progression to higher education (%) | 71 | 80 |
| Progression to other further education courses (%) | 9 | 4 |
| In employment or training (%) | 9 | 9 |
| Other (%) | 2 | 2.5 |
| Unknown (%) | 9 | 4.5 |

49 Students have gained public recognition by achieving high standards in their studies. In the past two years, three students have been placed in the top five candidates in GCE A level philosophy by one national examination board. The art department's summer exhibition was photographed by another national examination board to be kept and displayed as an example of good practice. Students' design and technology

projects have been selected to be displayed by the Department of Trade and Industry during their science and technology conference. Sports teams gained for the college the title of Surrey Sporting College of the Year which was sponsored by a local newspaper and an international car manufacturer. The college football first XI and first XV rugby teams were Surrey champions in the 1995-96 season. The women's netball team won the Surrey sixth form college tournament. Both the men's and women's hockey teams reached the quarter finals of the National Colleges Cup. Students have represented their county in football, rugby, netball and athletics, and England in hockey and basketball.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

50 There is keen awareness of the importance of quality among all college staff and a strong commitment to continuously raising standards. The college charter reflects the ethos of the college and it is displayed prominently. Students, staff and governors were involved in its creation. The charter is used during the induction of students in order to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities. Procedures for monitoring the implementation of charter commitments have been agreed, but they have yet to be applied.

51 The college has a quality assurance system which co-ordinates the main mechanisms for improving quality. There is a quality assurance manual which has recently been revised. In addition, there are various development groups which consider specific quality improvement issues and their findings are used to guide college policy. The system requires course and departmental reviews to be conducted annually, and outcomes are recorded to a standard format. Targets are not set systematically and practice varies across the college. Some action plans are vague, and more systematic monitoring by directors of faculty is needed. Students' attendance, retention, achievements and progression, and the views of students and clients, are carefully analysed by course teams. They are helped in this work by regular management information reports presented in an accessible form. Results are compared with local and national benchmarks. The college has a working group of management and teaching staff to develop GNVQ practice across the college. It evaluates external verifiers' reports and discusses new course proposals. The group advises the steering and policy groups.

52 The college makes careful use of value-added data to assess GCE A level and GNVQ performance. Profiles for each GCE A level and GNVQ subject are calculated and used to compare performance. Information from surveys of students' views is disseminated in a comprehensible form and is used to address areas of concern which are raised. Former students' achievements and estimates of potential achievement based on value-added predictions are used during enrolment to guide students' choice and provide motivation. Students are made aware of comparisons between

their potential and actual progress throughout their studies and, where a need for additional support is identified, it is provided.

53 The college is working towards the Investors in People standard. However, the first Investors in People assessment identified some management issues which needed to be addressed and achievement of the standard has been delayed. The predicted date for completion is June 1997. The staff-development budget, including the five days allocated to in-service training, stands at only 0.5 per cent of the college budget. Staff who ask to attend external courses are normally supported by the college. The college has a staff-development handbook which outlines induction procedures for academic and support staff. Staff-development records are inadequate. The evaluation of individual staff activities is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure the best use of resources. The college recognises the need to improve the dissemination of the outcomes of staff-development activities which have been attended. There is a good staff-development scheme for support staff, who are encouraged to train to improve their work and to contribute to their personal development.

54 In 1994, after an initial two-year pilot programme, the college introduced a full staff-appraisal system. At the time of inspection, only 40 per cent of academic staff and 90 per cent of support staff had been appraised. In response to an Investors in People assessment, the appraisal process has been modified and appraisal is now made by line managers. Appraisal includes observation of teaching and other tasks. Appraisal is linked to college objectives which provide a focus for improvement. This year the objective is better management of large classes. The principal or deputy principal conducts an annual interview with every member of staff. Staff receive guidance to help them assess their main achievements and to set out their aspirations for the future. This information provides a basis for the interview. Staff are encouraged to comment on the management of the college.

55 The college's self-assessment report was produced specially for the inspection. It is a generally sound summary of the main strengths and weaknesses of the college. The judgements are largely consistent with those of the inspectors. However, there are issues which are not addressed. The college is a member of an external quality review consortium through which staff in other colleges evaluate its work. The college sees this process as complementing its own self-assessment procedures; it intends to combine it with the work undertaken to achieve the Investors in People standard and the findings of its own review to achieve a more coherent approach to regular self-assessment.

RESOURCES

Staffing

56 The college has 61 full-time teachers and 19 part-time teachers. Fifty-two per cent of the full-time teachers and 89 per cent of the part-time teachers are women. The college employs eight full-time support staff and 21 part-time support staff. Thirty-seven per cent of the full-time staff and 81 per cent of the part-time staff are women. There are 32 middle managers at the college, of whom 56 per cent are women. There is one woman among the four senior managers. Four per cent of the full-time equivalent teaching staff come from minority ethnic groups, compared with 7 per cent of full-time equivalent students who come from such groups.

57 Teachers are well qualified for the work they do, except in one subject where staff do not have degrees in one of the subjects they teach. Seventy-seven of the total of 80 teachers have a first degree and 13 have higher degrees; 78 have a relevant teaching qualification and the remaining two have professional qualifications. In addition, 22 teachers have training and development lead body qualifications and a further 19 are working towards them. Few teachers have recent relevant business or industrial experience. The college plans to organise work-shadowing in industry for teachers, but it has not achieved its target of five placements in 1995-96. The level of assistance from technical and support staff is generally adequate, except in art and design where increased student numbers are stretching the technical support and in performing arts where administrative support is inadequate.

58 The deputy principal is responsible for personnel management. The college does not have a professionally-qualified personnel officer, but there is a contract with Surrey Educational Services for provision of personnel advice. Administrative tasks relating to personnel are shared between the office manager and the deputy principal's secretary. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood. There are comprehensive personnel handbooks for support staff and for teachers, both of which contain a code of conduct. There are clear procedures for recruiting staff, with guidelines for each stage in the process which take due account of equal opportunities considerations. Documentation is straightforward. Unsuccessful candidates are offered advice by the principal.

Equipment/learning resources

59 The college has a broad range of teaching aids, including overhead projectors, retractable screens and whiteboards in most rooms, and teachers have access to television and audio facilities. Furnishings and equipment in the new teaching block are very good. However, the quality of classroom furniture in the remaining building varies and some tables and chairs are old and too small. The surface of some fabric whiteboards is marked and scratched and, in rooms where whiteboards are used with

overhead projectors, there is considerable glare. Some window blinds need repair or replacement, and many cupboards and drawers in the science area need repair. There is good specialist equipment in areas such as English, three-dimensional design and electronics, but in several other curriculum areas it is inadequate. For example, there are no wall mirrors for students of dance; there is poor sound equipment in the theatre studies area; there is a small range of musical instruments; and there is only one video-editing suite which does not meet the demand from students on media studies and other courses. Science equipment is limited. The information technology equipment used in the mathematics area is old, though still functional. There is little software for art and design students to use. The college has a detailed assets register, but it does not have an equipment replacement plan.

60 The library is just large enough to meet the demands of the college's increasing number of students. It is well stocked with approximately 13,000 books, a wide range of periodicals, good compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities and some 241 cassettes. It also has an Internet connection. The library budget for 1996-97 is £18,000; £14 per full-time equivalent student. Books are listed on a computerised catalogue and the library monitors their use. There are 92 study places for students, though, when all are taken, there is not much room. There are varying practices in departments for supplying books to students. In some subjects, students in the same class use different editions of books. Some books are too expensive for students to buy, for example in psychology and physical education and, although one or two are available for overnight loan from the library, this limited access impedes students in their work.

61 The college has invested in a new independent learning centre where students can study on their own and has equipped it with modern computing, printing, editing and copying facilities. It contains 33 modern computers and a good range of learning support materials. However, because the centre is used for timetabled classes as well as being available to a growing number of students wanting access to computers on demand, there are sometimes too few computers to go round. There are other computers in the college; some departments allow students from outside the department to use them when they are not needed for timetabled classes but other departments do not. Some rooms used for GNVQ courses that are heavily reliant on the use of information technology do not contain enough computers for the students. The college has 120 computers for students' use, virtually all of which are of good specification, and these provide one machine for every 11 students. There is a draft information technology strategy which proposes the purchase of additional computers over a three-year period.

Accommodation

62 The college is set in seven hectares of pleasant, landscaped grounds, close to Thames Ditton. There are three tennis courts in the grounds, two soccer pitches, two hockey pitches, a rugby pitch and an open-air swimming pool. There is also a gymnasium and a house occupied by the caretaker. The main building, which was originally a boys' grammar school, the caretaker's house and the gymnasium were built in 1965. The main building was modified in 1975 when Esher College was established. Several classrooms were divided and a women's changing room was added, although it is some way from the gymnasium. Between 1977 and 1991, 10 huts were erected which provided 14 classrooms and three storerooms. A number of areas have been redeveloped, including the library, the kitchen and dining area, a lecture theatre and an electronics laboratory. A large new staff common room was completed in 1992. A new two-storey teaching block, which includes the independent learning centre and which has large bright teaching rooms, was completed in 1994. A connection has recently been completed at first floor level which will allow access to the library from the centre for wheelchair users. Access to parts of the original building is limited for wheelchair users.

63 The exteriors of the buildings are in generally good order. Teaching rooms in the original and new blocks are kept clean and there are some good display materials on classroom walls. Most communal areas are clean. Staff rooms throughout the buildings are of adequate size and are well equipped, and the main staff common room is bright and well furnished. The college has a comprehensive accommodation strategy and a 10-year maintenance plan. The grounds are well maintained and clear of litter except for the areas behind the huts where old or unserviceable equipment has been abandoned. These huts, though functional, are in poor order and their heating is unreliable. The students' canteen is too small and the small student common room and the main hall are used as part of the canteen. When the hall is used for other purposes, students have to stand in the canteen to eat. There are large storage cupboards in the new block, but limited storage space in some other areas. The gymnasium is old and needs repair and refurbishment. Painting and drawing lessons take place in carpeted rooms. The room used for teaching drama has a central support which hampers movement. Some of the science laboratories need much upgrading. The college is energetically pursuing a private funding initiative bid for building work to remedy many of these deficiencies.

64 The college finance officer is the estates manager. There is a health and safety officer; a health and safety policy; a clear manual which is given to all staff; staff development on health and safety issues; and an estates and health and safety group which monitors the implementation of the policy. A governor takes particular interest in health and safety matters in the college. Despite this, staff awareness of health and safety issues needs

strengthening. For example, some fire doors were partly blocked with equipment; leads to electrical equipment were left trailing across the access to doors; some rooms lack fire blankets or extinguishers; and it is difficult to locate first aid boxes. A mezzanine storage space used by staff in design technology is reached by a steep, wooden, spiral staircase without a handrail. A water pipe running along the wall provides the only means for support and there is no emergency exit.

65 Rooming is controlled by departments and the best use is not always made of the space. The college estimates that the space available for each of its students is about average for the sector. Signs around the college could be improved to make it easier to locate rooms.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

66 The particular strengths of the college are:

- its wide range of GCE A/AS subjects
- the expertise and commitment of governors
- the high quality of its guidance and learning support for students
- the high standard of teaching
- its work-experience programme for students
- consistently good students' achievements
- an effective management information system
- its commitment to quality improvement
- its effective use of value-added data to raise standards
- well-qualified and committed staff
- a well-equipped independent learning centre.

67 The college should address the following issues if it is to continue to improve its provision:

- the need to clarify the responsibilities of some senior managers
- poor management in some GNVQ courses
- inadequate planning and evaluation of staff-development activities
- poor equipment in some areas
- some poor accommodation
- the need to ensure consistent application of health and safety procedures.

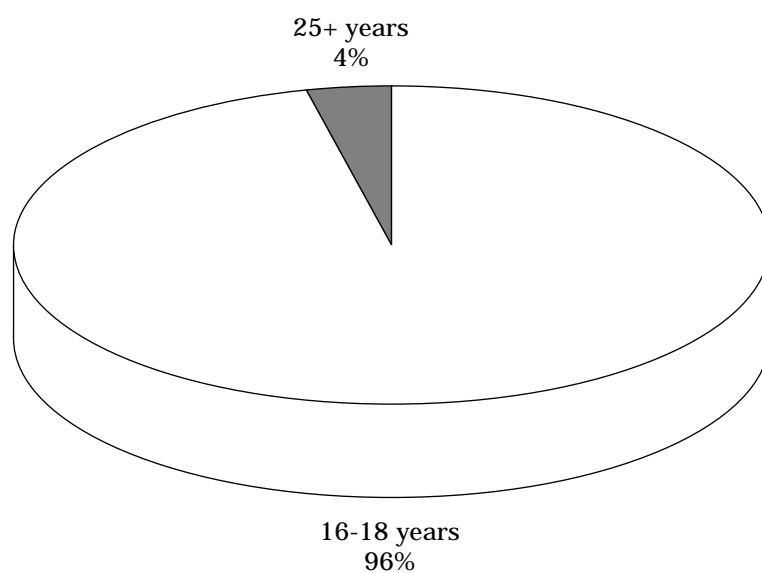
FIGURES

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996) |
| 2 | Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996) |
| 3 | Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996) |
| 4 | Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996) |
| 5 | Income (for 12 months to July 1996) |
| 6 | Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996) |

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

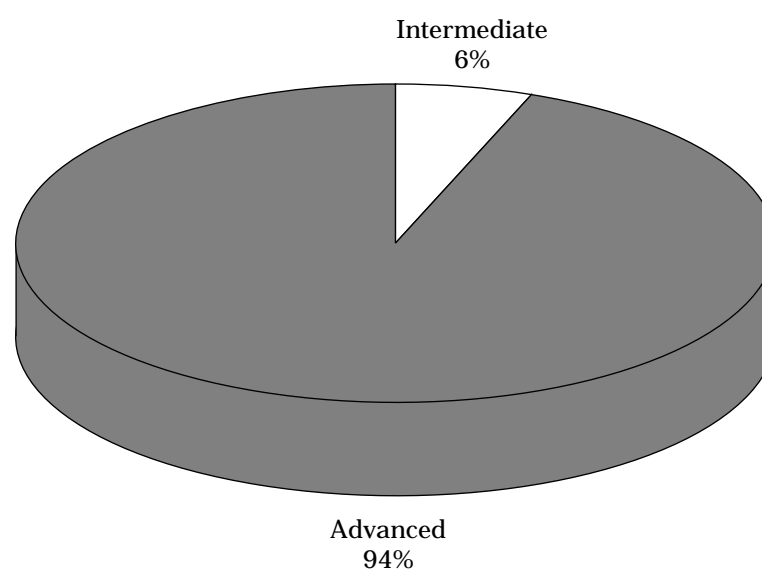
Esher College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,302

Figure 2

Esher College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,302

Figure 3

Esher College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

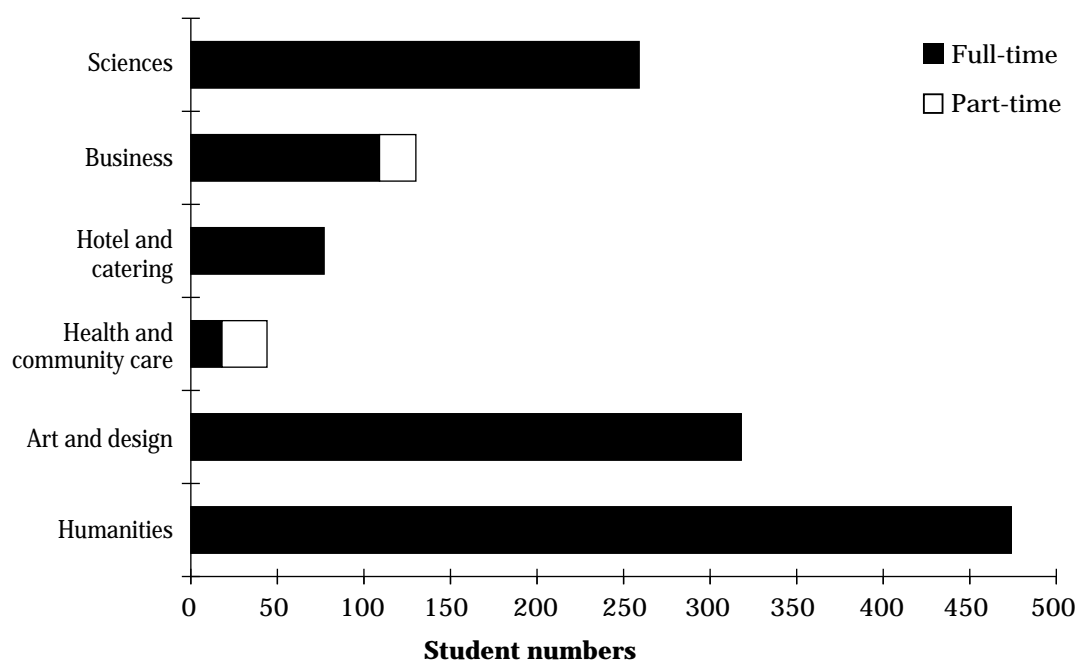


Figure 4

Esher College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)

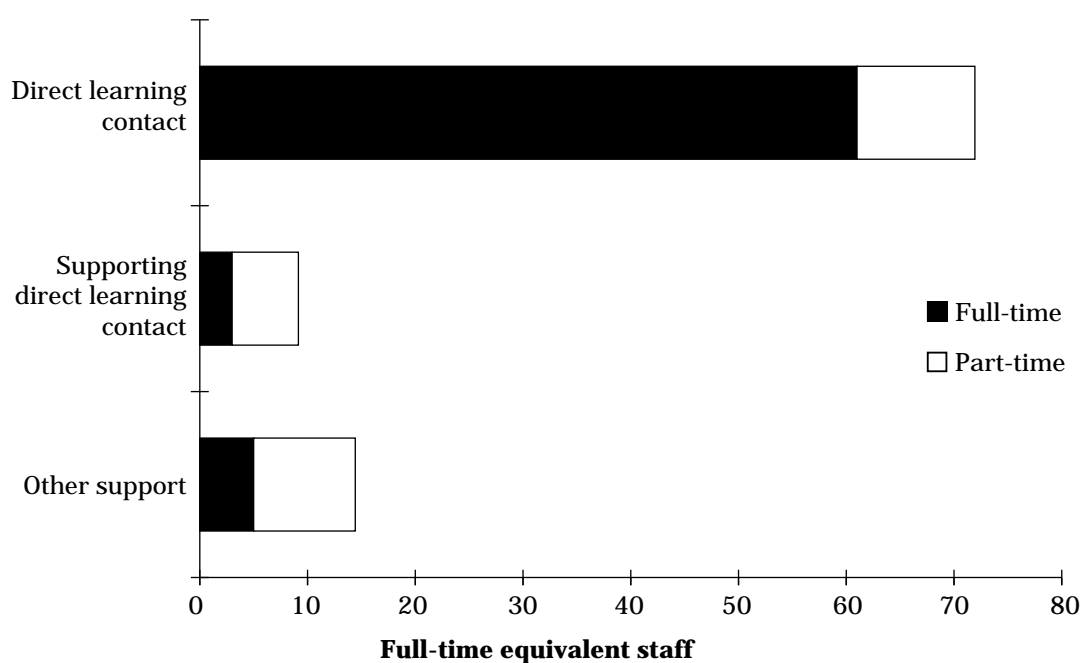
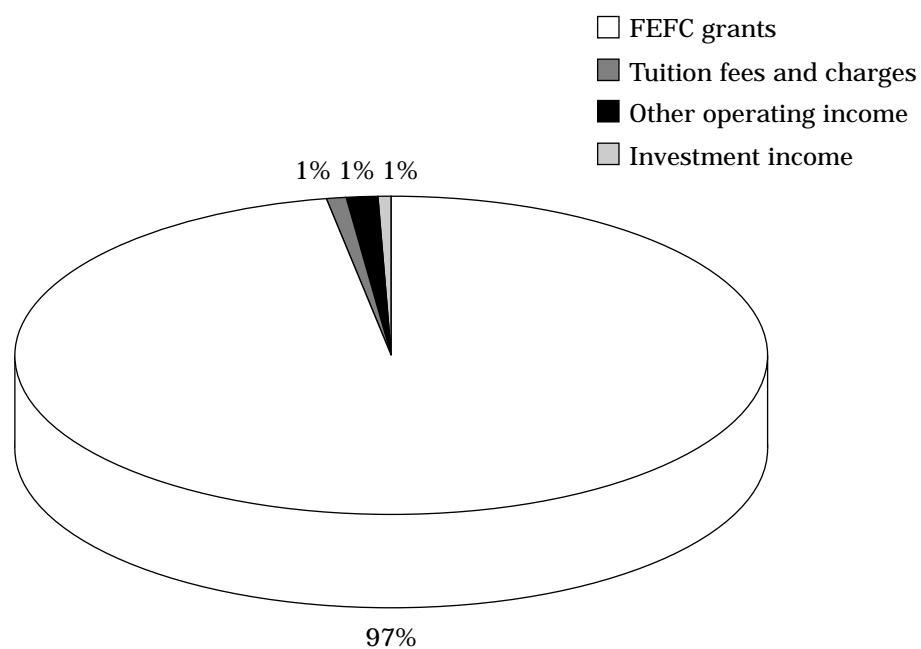


Figure 5

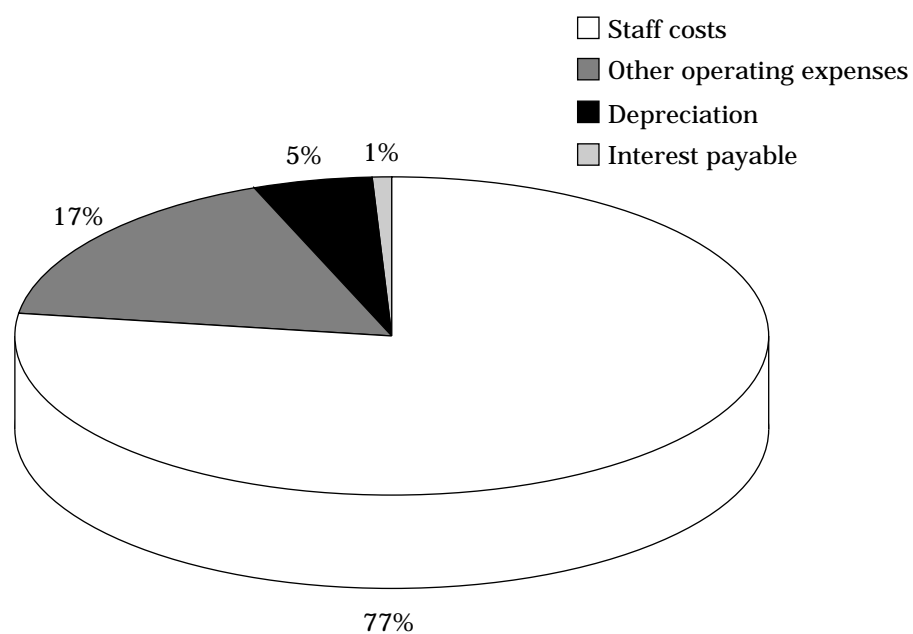
Esher College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £3,199,000

Figure 6

Esher College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £3,244,000

